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USSR:**Appointment of New Defense Minister**

Moscow's prompt announcement that Marshal Sokolov would succeed former Defense Minister Ustinov probably was intended to convey an impression of leadership cohesion and to avoid any appearance of disarray at the top.

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The TASS announcement of Sokolov's selection came on Saturday while Ustinov was lying in state. All the key political leaders played prominent roles in the ceremonies. Chernenko, Tikhonov, Gorbachev, and Gromyko—in that order—led the honor guard, while Romanov headed the funeral commission.

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Marshal Ogarkov, who had been touted for the Defense Minister's job before being removed as Chief of the General Staff, signed Ustinov's obituary. His name, however, appeared among those of middle-ranking Defense Ministry officials.

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Comment: The announcement of Sokolov's selection came unusually early compared with previous occasions when Soviet Defense Ministers have died in office. This speed, plus Sokolov's rise in military protocol lineups since late October, suggests that he may have been chosen as the next minister before Ustinov died. The Politburo probably met to reaffirm the selection following Secretary Gorbachev's return from Scotland on Friday.

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The selection accommodates military interests while ensuring continued party control. The military will be pleased that one of its own now heads the ministry. Sokolov, however, has appeared to be less assertive or independent-minded than his colleague Ogarkov. Romanov's chairing of the funeral commission, and the inclusion of KGB Chairman Chebrikov on it, underscored the subordination of the military to the political leadership. Sokolov's section leaves the military without representation on the Politburo, at least for the time being.

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The older members of the Politburo may feel more comfortable working with the 73-year-old Sokolov—who has spent 17 years as a First Deputy Defense Minister—than with younger officers such as Marshals Akhromeyev and Kulikov. Information about Sokolov's policy preferences is limited, but there are no indications that he would be inclined to press for a change in established policy lines.

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